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"There's a Sense of Pride": The Multilingual Children's Library as Perezhivanie

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ABSTRACT

Many libraries serve multilingual communities, however, research around multilingual libraries remains sparse. This study provides a theorized understanding of how a multilingual library is experienced by stakeholders, drawing on interviews and focus groups, event evaluations, and field observations. Findings highlight how multilingual communities value the metaphorical space, via the physical space allocated to stock and events, with borrowing influenced by complex rationales. The study troubles traditional notions of success within the field of library science, necessitating a reconceptualization of stock, borrowing and events in a multilingual library, aligning with notions of belonging and ownership that the multilingual library represents.

Introduction

Language is classified as part of UNESCO's definition of intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO n.d.), highlighting that the links between language, culture, and belonging are complex concerns that involve individual and collective emotions (ibid). Researching attachments and emotions linked to language and identity thus presents methodological challenges, since the intangible, by its very nature, is not easily measurable. Increasingly, though, research focuses on links between language, identity, and belonging, especially in situations where certain languages are minoritized as belonging to certain cultural groups in a variety of national contexts (see e.g. Guo and Gu 2018; Jonsson and Rosenfors 2017), and in both communities (see e.g. Hajek and Goglia 2020; Shen and Jiang 2021) and isolated families (see e.g. Little 2020) in diaspora. This work has highlighted that home or heritage language maintenance has strong links with identity, and requires consideration when it comes to cultivating a sense of belonging in diasporic families.

In the field of library science, multilingualism is typically presented as a logistical concern, i.e. considering mechanisms that might allow multilingual

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readers to access resources in the most efficient way. For this reason, existing literature is heavily dominated by research on digital libraries (Bilal and Bachir 2007; Vassilakaki and Garoufallou 2013; Wu and Chen 2022). While there are a vast number of studies focusing on the role of the library in the community, the intersectionality of multilingualism, identity, and libraries is almost completely absent from the literature – even in papers explicitly focusing on the role of the library for diasporic communities, adopting strong social justice approaches and viewing libraries as sites of refuge and restoration, language does not necessarily enter into the equation (Beasley 2017).

This paper, then, seeks to address this gap by explicitly focusing on the intersectionality of libraries, multilingualism, and identity. Specifically, it explores the notion of a "successful" library vis-a-vis its role in a multilingual community, and expands on what "success factors" might look like in these contexts. I offer the concept of perezhivanie (plural: perezhivaniya) – part of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky 1987, 1993, 1994) – as a lens or prism through which to explore the intangible links between emotion and cognition (Xu and Zhang 2023), focusing on the situatedness and impact of a multilingual children's library within an urban context. Specifically, perezhivanie offers a detailed and rigorous way to link stakeholders' experiences to emotions and reflections regarding a specific topic under investigation. In utilizing perezhivanie, I will examine two aspects linked traditionally to the notion of a library's "success" - the notion of stock, availability, and borrowing of books on the one hand, and the running of events on the other. Each of these traditional "success factors" is illuminated through the perizhivaniya of librarians and members of the community, including multilingual library users as well as their children. With this paper, I offer perezhivanie as an alternative lens through which to interpret the "success" of a library, and highlight where and how traditional measures may be inappropriate. The paper thus makes an original contribution to the field of library and information science by pinpointing how existing, traditional measures of success and performance indicators fail to take into account the lived experiences and emotional impact in marginalized – and especially multilingual – communities, arguing for new and different measurement criteria.

Multilingual (children's) libraries

The literature on multilingual children's libraries is extremely sparse. Extant literature on multilingual libraries is predominantly focused on either adult libraries (Dali 2022; Mani 2013), or digital libraries (Budzise-Weaver, Chen, and Mitchell 2012; Vassilakaki and Garoufallou 2013; Wu and Chen 2022), the latter being where most literature specific to children's libraries is situated (Bilal and Bachir 2007; Hutchinson et al. 2005).

Some researchers have begun to problematize the role of libraries in a globalized world. Mani (2013) in his essay "Borrowing Privileges" points toward libraries as the manifestation of a global outlook at any given point in time, and highlights how even cataloging systems are not politically value-free, since they are used to categorize and control or grant access. His essay is part of a growing body of research that not only argues for increased access to literature relevant for multilingual and multicultural communities but also considers underlying issues, such as more generic provision, cataloging, and the library as a metaphorical space, as well as a social justice issue (MoChridhe 2020; Little and Murray 2024).

The scarcity of research on multilingual children's libraries and their users is therefore also not neutral, but requires scrutiny, raising whether there are, in fact, no multilingual children's libraries, nor multilingual events happening, or whether the research environment in library science is skewed toward monoglossic narratives. Expanding the scope of literature shows that the answer to this question lies somewhere in-between. While a search of the research literature highlights that multilingual children's libraries – as physical spaces – remain rare, newspaper articles show that they occur more frequently than the research literature would lead us to believe (Korea chinadaily.com.cn 2022; Nordic Daily 2022; Pavlopoulou, Anagnostopoulou, and Xiaopeng 2019; Times 2019). At the same time, however, academic researchers are still prone to overlooking multilingual elements in relevant contexts. Igarashi, Koizumi, and Widdersheim (2023) focus on social division in public libraries and identify their role in introducing immigrants to host country culture, facilitating (host country) language learning. While they also mention that libraries offer spaces where people from a variety of cultural backgrounds may meet and learn about each other – thus contributing to social cohesion – maintenance of heritage language and culture is not mentioned. Similarly, Cahill et al. (2020) gathered information from 346 parents across 35 libraries in the United States on storytime activities and engagement, but references to language are made in relation to school readiness, foregrounding societal language, and acknowledging that parents may not have had the prerequisite English language skills to engage with the questionnaire. At a time when our communities become ever more diverse, it becomes necessary to examine terminology such as language and literacy development (Cahill et al. 2020; Joo et al. 2024) and the notions of "tradition" in "traditional songs" during storytime (de Vries 2008), being clear about whose languages, literacies and traditions are being foregrounded. This is not intended to diminish the research that has taken place; instead, it is an argument for care-with-language, avoiding homogenization of researched communities and falling into the trap of discourses that advantage certain

language communities and cultures. Community-centered research offers opportunities to redress the scales. Perezhivanie, in foregrounding the experiences and emotions of multilingual communities and librarians working with them, is therefore an appropriate lens to contribute meaningfully to this work.

Multilingual libraries are often dependent on the grassroots involvement of the community (Budzise-Weaver, Chen, and Mitchell 2012; Lauwo 2018; Korea Times 2019; Little and Murray 2024). Due to language diversity, community members may be called upon to help with translations of content or cataloging (Budzise-Weaver, Chen, and Mitchell 2012), or the running of events, such as storytelling activities (Lauwo 2018; Little and Murray 2024). Although circumstances may differ, research situates the multilingual library as a political space, with implied social justice considerations. As Lauwo (2018) argues in her research focused on a Tanzanian library, "speaking is a highly political act" (p. 134). Whose languages matter, and whose languages are "worthy" of physical and metaphorical space (e.g. via events, etc.) is not a neutral consideration, but one that illustrates a library's positionality toward minoritized communities (Lauwo 2018; Little and Murray 2024). Bearing in mind that children who grow up multilingually witness how their various languages are viewed and treated in society, a multilingual children's library can therefore have a significant impact on heritage language maintenance, and the development and support of a multilingual, multicultural identity (Little and Murray 2024; Nordic Daily 2022; Korea Times 2019).

Practical issues can also hamper a more holistic integration of multilingual (children's) libraries. Both anecdotal and research evidence shows that multilingual libraries or collections are typically not resourced in the same way as other libraries, relying on crowdfunding and donations (chinadaily.com.cn 2022; Nomura and Caidi 2013; Little and Murray 2024; Pavlopoulou, Anagnostopoulou, and Xiaopeng 2019). Nevertheless, some high profile multilingual libraries may have funding in place (Schwartz 2019), which also facilitates the creation of more inclusive cataloging systems (ibid). In Nomura and Caidi's (2013) study, Japanese mothers in Canada expressed multiple concerns regarding access to the library catalog, which did not facilitate Japanese script and did not facilitate browsing by age group.

The experience and confidence level of librarians in working in multilingual communities is also an important consideration. Dali (2022) highlights that, although some librarians – especially those with multilingual and multicultural experiences themselves – are confident in engaging with multilingual communities, there are still some who believe that it is up to heritage language communities to assimilate, resulting in some members of the staff not wishing to disclose their bilingualism. These concerns bring the argument full circle, showing that even "practical" issues are inextricably linked to sociopolitical context and social justice.

The "successful" library

Extant literature about the notion of "success" in libraries spans a wide range of methods, methodologies, and interpretations, also including terminology such as "value" (Noh 2017; Gilpin, Karger, and Nencka (2024) and "effectiveness" (Bijali 2022; Singh and Trinchetta 2020). The International Standard for library performance indicators (International Organization for Standardization 2023), currently in its fourth edition, has concerned itself with the development of library performance indicators since 1998, during which time the number of performance indicators has grown from 29 to 61 (Poll 2024), indicating an expansion of the library's role, as well as a growing, additional focus on digital provision. What is clear is that the standards have been devised to compare the "effectiveness of the service provision by the library and the efficiency of the allocation and use of resources in providing services" (Poll 2024, online first). While various editions of the standards have taken into account different libraries (e.g. indicators focusing on electronic content were added in 2008, and indicators for national libraries were added in 2014), multilingual libraries and collections serve a specific subsection of users, and are therefore not captured in these more traditional ways of measuring success and effectiveness. In the same vein, while certain specific library groups have developed quality measures that allow for their specificities (e.g. the LibQual survey for academic libraries, see e.g. Ip and Wagner 2020; McCaffrey 2019), multilingual libraries, and, specifically, multilingual children's libraries, do not benefit from enough research to enable our understanding of what "success" might look like in this context, something this study seeks to address.

Appleton (2017) goes beyond existing surveys aimed at measuring quality, exploring what a key performance indicator (KPI) might look like when it is developed at a local level. He explains that many existing statistics available to libraries that are typically used to measure "success," "e.g. statistics on footfall, holdings, loans, renewals, database use, downloads, views, social media followers" (p. 54) are in fact tools to be stacked and combined to build individual KPIs. Therefore, for example, the number of books in stock provides a basic statistic, the number of books issued as percentage of active stock a user statistic, and this allows the setting of targets, e.g. increasing the number of issues by 50%, etc. (p. 67). The KPI is therefore a pre-decided measurement of success that should not be retrofitted onto existing data, but form part of strategic planning. Crucially, Appleton (2017) also states that "[i]n order for an indicator to be regarded as 'key' it has to be related to the most important and critical aspects of your library service" (p. 70). In the context of a multilingual library or collection, where any given language individually will serve but a fraction of the population, it is therefore challenging to push KPIs linked to multilingual provision into the foreground.

Since libraries and, in particularly, public libraries, typically occupy a financially precarious space and rely on public spending, there is a plethora of literature that focuses on the notion of success from an economical perspective (see e.g. Sumsion, Hawkins, and Morris 2002). In an effort to evidence impact and justify public monies received, a variety of metrics are readily employed. In a very recent study, Gilpin, Karger, and Nencka (2024) link investment in children's libraries to increased stock, increased borrowing figures, improved attendance at events, and, finally, to improved reading scores in tests at schools in the districts served by the libraries. Drawing on data from 17,000 libraries and 5,000 schools in the United States, the study is an important example of how metrics and statistics can be employed to consider the success and impact of libraries on a large scale. In line with other performance measures outlined above, their approach focuses on big data and statistical analysis, which are not available for multilingual libraries, thus necessitating a different approach.

What "success" looks like is therefore a malleable concept that gets defined and redefined according to context, and there are not enough research studies from within the context of multilingual libraries to help us define success measures. This paper, by focusing on the experiences of stakeholders in a multilingual child's library, therefore aims to contribute to our understanding of "success" and library performance in this emerging field.

Methodology

Research context: Sheffield and the multilingual children's library

The multilingual children's library that forms the background to this paper was created as a fully embedded subsection of Sheffield's (UK) central children's library, occupying the same space. Sheffield is a city in the north of England, with a population of around 550,000 inhabitants at the last census. Of these, 74.5% identified themselves as White with a UK-context background (British, English, Welsh, Scottish, or Northern Irish), down from 80.8% in the previous census, 10 years earlier (Office for National Statistics 2022). While 91.2% list English as their main language, the census has previously been criticized for not catering to multilingual communities, since it allows for the naming of one language only, thus failing to acknowledge the role of bi- and multilingualism in people's lives (Sebba 2017, 2018).

Initially planned as a pilot project, the multilingual children's library formed part of the library's services, intending to broaden its scope and provision for Sheffield's communities, including those from migration backgrounds. Data collection for the pilot spanned 16 months, and the library as a case is presented comprehensively elsewhere (Little and Murray 2024). What is notable is that the library received no funding, i.e. there was no costing allocation for budget for

stock, although staff commitment was built into existing workloads. As indicated in the literature review, multilingual libraries or library sections are typically less well resourced than sections in societal languages (chinadaily.com.cn 2022; Pavlopoulou, Anagnostopoulou, and Xiaopeng 2019), despite libraries having a remit to serve the entire local community. Against a backdrop of systemic cuts, however, the creation of a full library section for the purposes of the pilot would have been prohibitively expensive. Creating the library through donations meant that the endeavor became, by necessity, a community affair, with heritage language schools and families from a wide variety of backgrounds becoming involved, and donations being received from local communities, publishers, authors, illustrators, and translators. While this was due to financial pressures, it had the added benefit of the library entering the public consciousness quickly, leading to a sense of investment among the local community.

Defining perezhivanie

Perezhivanie is a term that, in the English-speaking world, is typically associated with Vygotsky's work of psychology as related to sociocultural theory, where it has been variably translated as "lived experiences" (Mochizuki 2019) or "lived emotional experience" (Bektaş-Çetinkaya 2024). Blunden (2016), in dedicating an entire paper to the translation and etymology of the word, explains that the concept of perezhivanie is much older in Russian and German psychology. Linguistically, perezhivanie is composed of the verb "zhivat" - to live, and "pere," a prefix that may mean "over-" or "trans-." The most commonly used translation in English, "experience" lacks the nuance of the original term, which, Blunden (2016) argues, incorporates the "overcoming" of something as part of the lived experience. German, as an example, has two translations for the English "experience" - "Erlebnis," which is an experience more linked to adventure, and "Erfahrung," which is an experience that is more linked to personal growth, learning, or other enrichment – "perezhivanie" is translated into German as the latter.

In order to address the multitude of interpretations, Cong-Lem (2022) returned to Vygotsky's original texts, arriving at the following three distinguishable conceptualizations of perezhivanie:

> *(1) as a theoretical relation between an individual and their environment, (2) as a person's attitude towards or an abstract/generalised experience of their holistic life situation and (3) as a concrete experience of a specific event within that social situation.*

> Cong-Lem (2022), *p. 4*

Veresov and Fleer (2016) similarly warn that, unless perezhivanie is theorized and employed appropriately, Vygotzky's "theoretical legacy" (p. 325) is in danger. In their study, Veresov and Fleer offer empirical data linked to three contents of the concept, specifically:

(1) *perezhivanie as a refracting prism*
(2) *perezhivanie as a unit of environmental and personal characteristics*
(3) *perezhivanie as a unit of consciousness*

<div align="right">Veresov and Fleer (2016), p. 325</div>

Based on both of these interpretations, perezhivanie in this paper has been theorized as a refracting prism through which to explore certain environmental factors – linked to the multilingual children's library – through the cognitive and emotional attitudes and experiences of those involved, namely, library staff, families, the general public, and, at times, myself as researcher/coordinator/instigator of the project. Crucially, the unit of analysis here is the library itself, with perezhivanie serving as an opportunity to turn a refracted gaze to its "success," seeking to trouble the meaning of the term and to redefine it in light of the perezhivaniya discussed.

Although Vygotsky's work is focused in the realm of child development, perezhivanie has been used more widely in the field of education, including in teacher training and professional development (Clegg-Sasaki, Leontjev, and de Boer 2024; Yang and Markauskaite 2023), language learning (Bektaş-Çetinkaya 2024; Xu and Zhang 2023), and, of course, children's development (Veresov and Fleer 2016), although it is as yet unexplored in library and information science. In this paper, perezhivanie is used as an analytical tool to explore key aspects from the creation of a multilingual children's library through the experiences of those who experienced it, specifically, librarians and various members of the community, including multilingual parents, children, and casual (non-multilingual) visitors to the library, and myself, as researcher and cultural/community broker. Like a lens, or rather, a prism, perezhivanie supports the refraction of experiences from both cognitive and emotional perspectives (Bektaş-Çetinkaya 2024; Cong-Lem 2022).

Situating perezhivanie in wider research discourse

Based on his analysis of Vygotsky's texts, Cong-Lem (2022) describes perezhivanie as the relationship between the individual and the environment, explored through the gaze of experience. Vygotsky specifically argues that environmental factors should and could not be studied in isolation, but instead need to be viewed through the lens of experience. In this context, environments do not exist in a vacuum, but only as part of situated experiences of those inhabiting or interacting with these environments. As such, perezhivanie shares certain characteristics with ethnography, which has been used to research the user experience in libraries (Priestner and Borg 2016) as an alternative to more "traditional quantitative measures" (Appleton 2017, 54). However, whereas ethnographical research in library contexts is primarily focused on the user experience (UX), perezhivanie explicitly links experience

to cognition, allowing for theorization from the data. Put simply, rather than simply focusing on "what" users do in the multilingual library and "how" they do it, perezhivanie gives us insight into reflections on "why" they do it, how the library relates to wider life experience, and, crucially for this paper, facilitates the triangulation of different perezhivaniya to understand how the library as a phenomenon is experienced from a variety of relevant perspectives. Further, ethnography in the library context has been used to understand the library as a physical space (Bryant, Matthews, and Walton 2009), whereas the value of the multilingual library space has been identified as being both physical and metaphorical (Little and Murray 2024), which warrants further investigation.

While perezhivanie has predominantly been used to explore perceptions and experiences of a phenomenon from one angle, this paper, in contrast, employs perezhivanie as an analytical tool that explicitly and systematically uses the perezhivaniya of multiple stakeholders – librarians, multilingual families, and the researcher, to rigorously examine one particular phenomenon, namely the multilingual children's library. In doing so, perezhivanie is particularly helpful in illuminating a specific occurrence or concept from a variety of angles, providing multiple interpretations that challenge traditional perceptions of "successful" libraries and contribute to our understanding of how libraries and their services are experienced and reflected upon by users, specifically, users from diverse backgrounds.

Participant recruitment and data collection

The 16-month pilot period was supported by a rigorous and comprehensive data collection process, including both qualitative and quantitative data. Specifically, data available for analysis are included below (see Table 1):

While the full data set was analyzed for a previous paper (Little and Murray 2024), this paper focuses in particular on the qualitative data, primarily from parent and librarian interviews and focus groups, but supplemented by research notes and event evaluations as appropriate to the exploration of the two aspects under investigation, specifically,

Table 1. Data available for analysis.

Data type	Available data
Quantitative	Statistical data focused on stock (both in terms of number of books and available languages) and borrowing figures in reaction to these.
Qualitative	Formal feedback gathered from a variety of events that formed part of the pilot, including multilingual storytelling, 'readathons,' and writing events, both via feedback forms and via short verbal comments captured, totaling data from approximately 900 participants.
Qualitative	Field observation notes from events outlined above, and reflections (research diary).
Qualitative	Focus group data from three library staff members who were key to the multilingual children's library. Focus group recorded length: 49 minutes.
Qualitative	Data from interviews and focus groups with parents (one solo interview, one pair interview, and one focus group of three, based on participant preferences and availability). Total recorded length: 115 minutes.

perezhivaniya linked to multilingual storytelling events, and perezhivaniya linked to stock and borrowing. These qualitative data are supplemented by the occasional numerical reference to provide critical contextualization.

Recruitment of participants depended on the demographic and method. In line with other event-based research (Mair and Whitford 2013), observation notes were anonymous and announcements displayed during events shared information about observation protocol and evaluation forms. As well as observation notes, some personal reflections in the form of research diary notes are also included for analysis in this paper, contributing the perezhivaniya of myself as coordinator/instigator of the project.

Focus groups and interviews involved formal recruitment, inviting participants either by e-mail (for library staff, who formed a contained target participant group) or via notes at events, social media, and/or via e-mail addresses left on evaluation forms for this purpose (for parents). In all instances, participants for focus groups and interviews volunteered, and were given information sheets and consent forms, and the opportunity to ask questions about the study. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, with some taking place online due to participant preference, acknowledging childcare responsibilities and transport needs.

Ethical considerations

Due to the strong links between language and identity, research that focuses on multilingual communities by default necessitates ethical considerations regarding sensitive conduct in these contexts. In particular, I am mindful not to homogenize a city's vibrant, multilingual and multicultural community by forcing it into a single "othering" discourse – by including individual voices, it is therefore intended to show where these voices converge and differ from each other, and perezhivaniya allows for this connection between agency and cognition. Understanding language-related and cultural barriers when working in diverse communities is vital, and heritage language schools were welcome cultural brokers (Lee, Sulaiman-Hill, and Thompson 2014). I was furthermore aware that my role as an immigrant and bilingual mother situated me as a participant researcher within the wider community, connecting me to the parents in the study, whereas my role as a language and literacy-focused academic positioned me as somewhat insider-adjacent to library staff.

At a more practical level, as outlined above, informed consent was sought in writing from all interview and focus group participants, and the study received ethics approval from the host institution. For quotes drawn from event evaluation data, information about data capture and publication was provided on notices around events, on evaluation sheets, and provided verbally for brief evaluative comments and experiences shared, in alignment with ethical

events-based research (Mair and Whitford 2013). All names within the find-
ings are pseudonyms.

Data analysis

Data available include statistical information, such as figures for borrowing
and stock, interview and focus group data with parents (six parents in total),
a focus group with library staff, observation data, researcher reflections, and
evaluations from six events aimed at the multilingual community, attracting
a total of 900 visitors. Rather than exploring these data separately, perezhivanie
facilitates a kaleidoscopic view, or "refraction" (Agnoletto, de Carvalho
Kuerten Dellagnelo, and Johnson 2022; Bektaş-Çetinkaya 2024), applying
multiple lenses from different perspectives, which help increase understanding
about a specific event or phenomenon through the perezhivanie of those
involved. In line with Vygotsky's work, focusing on the perezhivaniya of
those involved allows for the illumination of sociocultural phenomena and
environmental factors, in this instance, how specific aspects of the multilingual
children's library were experienced by relevant stakeholders. Relevant data
sources have therefore been scrutinized to identify perezhivaniya that relate to
events, stock and borrowing, in order to provide an alternative lens to some of
the more traditional ways to explore these key measurement criteria. The
relevant perezhivaniya were then brought together according to themes,
where they, through juxtaposition and reinforcement, illuminate the topics
under investigation, and highlight the notion of "success" (or lack thereof)
through the eyes of key stakeholders. By offering the context of perezhivanie,
via the experiences and interpretations of those involved (e.g. library staff and
members of the public), data that are typically expected to stand for themselves
are interrogated and examined, asking whether methodologies used to date are
fit for purpose when it comes to meaning making in this context. Therefore, in
alignment with some of the more traditional "success" measures outlined
above, the data below focus on two strands: on the one hand, environmental
factors, such as stock and borrowing, on the other hand, events related to the
multilingual children's library are explored. The inclusion of observation notes
and reflections add my own voice and experiences – my own perezhivaniya –
to the two aspects under consideration.

Limitations

Despite the length, breadth and depth of the study, any work in
a multilingual context that seeks to make light of the complexities involved
is in danger of homogenizing the very community it seeks to serve.
Therefore, it needs pointing out that, while event feedback was gathered
from a wide variety of members from the general population, parent focus

groups and interviews involved six parents in total, all mothers. The study, while rigorous in its own right, is focused on a single library within a single local and national context, and further research, building on the new knowledge presented in this study, will be needed to build the field of multilingualism in library science.

Findings and discussion

Context 1: perezhivaniya linked to multilingual storytelling events

The multilingual children's library held four separate multilingual storytelling or shared reading events during the pilot period. For three of these events, the organization involved identifying volunteers – either from heritage language schools or from the general public – to read or tell a story at various points throughout the day, with readers spaced evenly during library opening hours. On most occasions, this involved a different story approximately every half hour. The fourth event was structured as a "multilingual readathon" after a bilingual picture book was donated from a publisher in 21 languages, the aim being to read the book in as many of the languages as possible (14 were managed). All events took place in the main children's library, which included both the multilingual children's library and the (larger) English language section, as well as the typical library collection of games, toys, and DVDs. The first event was co-organized with local heritage language schools, some of whom brought entire classes to the event, resulting in a librarian stating they had never seen the library so full, half-jokingly suggesting they check health and safety arrangements regarding the maximum number of visitors. The first event therefore sent an extremely powerful message – whereas individual language groups may be seen as a small minority, combining a number of language groups into a single event had a unifying effect, highlighting multilingual families as a significant minority in the city. This was also experienced by visitors, with comments from evaluation forms offering statements linked to positive emotions, such as "it's great, I've never heard so many languages in one place," "I never thought about Sheffield having this many languages," and "I love that my son can hear his language spoken in the library," with variations of the final comment appearing again and again in evaluation comments. Library staff were in a position to offer both cognitive and emotional perezhivaniya, reflecting on their experiences with the multilingual storytelling events compared to other events that foregrounded English, with a member of staff stating:

> I think it is a different group. Because although our audience is really diverse, I don't know, they do seem to focus more on the English books. [...] But then people who are in will then get involved with both, and they tend to be very busy, quite vibrant events, which is lovely really.

Comparing this with parents' experiences, it was true that they went out of their way to attend the events, with all of them stating they had made a trip especially to visit the multilingual library, even when other local branches were closer.

> Well we had not been to Central Library, we used [two local libraries] just because they are closer to us and you know saves on parking or getting a bus. So we go to both of them. But since the opening of the multilingual section we have been a few times. (Stephanie)

Parents' decisions to make the trip to the central library were based on a wide variety of perezhivaniya, the experiences they and their children had when they did make the trip. One parent at an event explained:

> It's worth going, so he'll hear the language. Our local library doesn't have that [multi-lingual storytelling events]. And he can see that other children can speak different languages, too, so he knows he's not alone, and it's cool to be able to do that.

The use of the word "worth" literally indicates the value parents assign to the library, with the metaphorical space it represents being worth the physical journey. Acknowledged by library staff were also the logistics of pulling off a multilingual storytelling event, i.e. mixing multiple languages in the same event, which seemed to be particularly successful. Embedded in library staff's perezhivaniya of the multilingual storytelling events was the cognition that they involved community engagement at a hitherto unexplored level:

> You've got the connections. I mean I don't think we could have done the multilingual events that you've done because we just don't have the connections. We don't know the languages, so to get people in you've got the connections to get the people in who are talking and making those connections with people.

The comment highlights how the staff member's perezhivaniya positioned me in a role of someone who has access to people and communities the library traditionally might not, thus facilitating the storytelling experience.

Parents did not just attend the multilingual storytelling events but also volunteered as readers and storytellers, and this was facilitated both in advance, when the event was prepared, by asking for volunteers on social media, and on the day, when parents could spontaneously decide to get involved. Tiesa, a Lithuanian-speaking Mum, reflected on her perezhivanie as a contributor to an event. After stating she was very nervous about doing it, "because I didn't know how many children would be there, and all the layout and everything," she gave the following reflection for getting involved despite her nerves:

> [We usually speak Lithuanian] just at home or when I go back home. And I think that's important for children, to know that it's not just like something you speak with your mum, […] you know just to see that [the language] is needed and you can use it anywhere. […] Listening to other families speaking other languages is important, the children think, "oh

this is something special, everybody can speak their own language" and it's not something like to hide or be ashamed of but it's the opposite.

Library staff considered one traditional measurement of success, specifically, increasing enrollment, in relation to storytelling events. One member of staff commented "your events bring people in specifically that haven't been in before. I would say we definitely joined [i.e. enrolled] people from that." Observation notes show that multiple families were observed to register during events, but no family shared experiences specifically linked to enrolling in the library as part of the data collection – the families in the focus groups already had library cards. Nevertheless, their experiences show that the events increased attendance and library use, but also offered a different emotional attachment to what the library meant to them. As events continued, spontaneous engagement during storytelling and reading became more frequent, and children began to participate as readers to the group. My own reflections from the research diary state:

> *They see other children read and they gain in confidence, it's such a positive vibe, they support each other, nobody laughs, and when they finish, everybody claps, even if they didn't understand the language. I wonder how often their language skills get applause outside of this setting?*

The positive acknowledgment of language skills was identified in a previous publication (Little and Murray 2024), where a mother shared her child's experience of getting a certificate and medal for her involvement, which served as a transferable artifact that could be used to highlight multilingualism as a desirable trait in other contexts, including school.

Acknowledging the notion of "success" in light of storytelling events, then, traditional measurements of success were upheld in the perezhivaniya of those involved. For library staff, the events brought people through the door, including families who had previously not engaged with the library. For parents, the measure of success involved seeing and hearing the home or heritage language in public, and taking an active role in making this happen. Children, similarly, benefited from the inclusive space the storytelling events created, and had the opportunity to take on agentive roles in their own heritage, language maintenance and development.

Context 2: perezhivaniya linked to stock and borrowing

In the perezhivaniya linked to this context, borrowing is not only interpreted in the narrow sense of identifying where and how books were taken off the premises but also a wider sense of engagement with the concept of borrowing, which includes active "not-borrowing," and community interest in borrowing, none of which are captured by traditional measurements. Similarly, "stock" is not simply a series of numbers or titles, but instead explores more widely the

perezhivaniya related to stock, including engagement with stock, whether through browsing or cataloging. In doing so, the perezhivaniya around stock and borrowing enables a holistic overview of the difficulties experienced by both library staff and the general public, how these difficulties were overcome, and also reflections and engagement with stock and borrowing at a more philosophical level.

Because the library was stocked entirely via donations, stock and availability of books were down to a combination of luck and goodwill. With many donations coming from authors, illustrators, translators, and publishers, the donated books had a distinct weighting toward those languages that have a solid children's publishing industry, specifically, an industry involving book translations, foregrounding Western European languages. Staff had to fit the cataloging into their ongoing workloads, which added pressure to already busy schedules.

Staff perezhivaniya also show that their cognitive and emotional engagement with multilingual stock was slightly different to that of the resources available in English. Whereas staff felt they knew the English books well, and were used to families coming in and asking for specific authors or topics, they felt less sure about the multilingual stock, stating:

> We don't actually know what's on the shelves and yet we're down here all the time. And if you're kind of offering "well there's some languages" and we just have to go and look. And yeah if you know solid, which languages you're offering and roughly how many even, rather than lots and lots of different languages.

Important here is that language, rather than content, was the primary factor, as might be expected in a library (section) that focuses on expanding the languages on offer. What is worth considering, though, is that families would not necessarily view the multilingual section in isolation, and would regularly combine borrowing. One evaluation form stated:

> We look what's there in our language (Portuguese), and then we also borrow other books in English, that we like the look of.

This comment (and other, similar ones coming through the evaluation) highlights that multilingual families viewed the library through a multilingual lens, mirroring their multilingual lives, where different languages comingle and inhabit the same cognitive space. The term "full linguistic repertoire" (Otheguy, García, and Reid 2015) offers a useful definition here, viewing families' languages holistically, rather than in isolation, and showing that, despite the importance of access to resources in the home or heritage language, reading habits are governed by a multitude of components, of which language is just one (Little 2024). It is also a strong argument for housing the multilingual selection within the main children's library, rather than segregating it,

since this segregation does not exist – either physically or cognitively – in the minds of the families.

The catalog was experienced by families as a particular hurdle, as Tiesa explains:

> I think last time I looked I couldn't find, like you know let's say with English books you can go on an online catalogue and see what's there and search and reserve, but when I looked there wasn't like a list, you know "this is like a multilingual section and these are the books that we have." But I don't know how, practically, whether it's a lot of work for somebody, you know to catalogue it all. But I think that might be useful. And I think just a simple thing like probably some dividers.

The concept of perezhivanie is important here – what matters is not that the catalog can, in fact, be searched by language. Instead, what matters is Tiesa's experience, which is shaped by her lack of understanding of how the multilingual catalog works. Similarly, although there were no dividers in the library, the books were sorted by language, but, since this was not immediately apparent, Tiesa's perezhivanie shows confusion and, at times, frustration. The mention of "a lot of work" is particularly poignant since staff members had indeed undertaken that work, in cataloging the multilingual resources.

The same is repeated in parents' perezhivaniya of access, in various forms. When, for example, parents in the focus groups explain that the central library is quite a distance away, making it difficult to borrow books (Stephanie), or express that they wish more books in Spanish were available (Rafaela), the facts that books could have been sent to local libraries within the same council, or that Spanish was, with 88 books, the second-highest represented language, do not, in effect, matter, and perezhivanie here highlights how the focus on experience can contextualize our understanding of the multilingual children's library's "success" through stakeholders' perceptions.

Moving from access and stock to borrowing, staff offered a complex narrative for how the multilingual library was being used. One staff member commented:

> [People] are probably using the [library] service more than they would have because there's now that other [multilingual] option. It's like the lady who comes in and she always comes in and sits and reads the Spanish books to her little one, but borrows English books regularly.

This remark highlights the important affordance of perezhivanie as a multidimensional lens. Not only do staff observations provide context for what, in quantitative terms, would be challenging to analyze, since the use of the multilingual library in this context would register neither in additional enrollment nor in borrowing of multilingual stock, but they also provide a focus for the perezhivanie of parents, understanding how borrowing was experienced by them.

In fact, when asked, parents had two specific reasons for not taking the multilingual books out of the library. They explained their what might be called "active not-borrowing" in terms of community awareness, and as a recognition of the impact the library as a public space had on their children. Regarding the former, Stephanie explains:

> There are not that many books, so if I take them, then another family might not be able to get any. They don't take long to read, so we read them in the library and put them back, so another family can enjoy them.

The sentiment was echoed by several of the parents at interviews and focus groups, and also during events, when evaluation questions like "Will you be taking any books home today?" were met with an awareness that the multilingual books were a limited resource to be shared. Of equal importance, though, was parents' view of the library as a public space. One parent at an event answered the above question with: "We will read it here. Our language is already at home, but it's not in the library, so it's great to have that." Similarly, in the parent interviews, Tiesa explained: "It's the library, and for [my daughter] to see there are books there [in our language], not just at home, it means our language is important – we are important." The notion that being "worthy" of space in the library is extrapolated to a very personal perezhivanie of being valued and important by multilingual families is a crucial success factor that is masked by low borrowing figures, highlighting the need for a wide range of evaluation mechanisms. My own fieldnotes highlight multiple occasions where families treat the presence of books in a public space as a "revelation" for the children, asking them to browse the shelves, and then responding with excitement and celebration when "their" language is spotted. The multilingual children's library was clearly experienced as a metaphorical as well as a physical space (Little and Murray 2024), and needs to be understood as such.

There was also a trend for people who had donated books to return and check on them, due to a sense of pride and ownership. One member of staff explained:

> The people who've donated the books have come back and keep coming back to go see if anyone's borrowing them and that kind of thing. So there's a sense of pride I think, a personal pride for people having contributed to something like that

Another member of staff provided a specific memory:

> I remember the guy who donated the Spanish books and when he came in there were none of them on the shelves and he was like "where are all my Spanish books" and I was like "well they're out." Because we prioritize the languages that we know are going to be used a lot [...] so Spanish I tend to put out because I know that they're really popular. And so I was like "we're putting them out so they've just been borrowed, that's a really good thing."

In sharing these reflections, it becomes obvious that stock that comes into existence via strong community engagement leads to an investment in its success. Similarly to the individuals described above, two heritage language schools donated their school library (i.e. a box of books in the heritage language) to the multilingual children's library, explaining that they felt it important to support the endeavor, especially if it meant the language would move into a public space. The perezhivaniya around stock therefore show the sense of pride and ownership that comes from having had the chance to contribute to its creation and related events – they are an important contributor to how the library is viewed within the community. Although community engagement in providing stock was primarily a financial consideration, it impacted on community members' perezhivaniya by adding a sense of responsibility and ownership.

Conclusion

In this paper, the theoretical construct of perezhivanie functions as a meaningful, multifactorial analytical lens to shine a light on how experiences shape perceptions. Whereas previous research on perezhivanie primarily foregrounds single stakeholder groups, I offer perezhivanie as an analytical tool that specifically illuminates one aspect under investigation – the multilingual children's library – from the experiences and related reflections via three different, sometimes contrasting perspectives: multilingual families, librarians, and myself as researcher. In utilizing perezhivanie in this highly focused way, it becomes a new and meaningful pathway that troubles some of the traditional notions of "success" in the field of library science, by offering ways of theorizing experiences.

In this context, traditional notions around stock and events are reframed through the lens of perezhivanie, and become a representation for belonging and ownership (see Table 2). Specifically, belonging and ownership can

Table 2. Reconceptualization of the meaning of success as linked to "stock and borrowing" and "events" in the contexts of multilingual libraries.

Stock and borrowing as belonging and ownership	Events as belonging and ownership
The mere presence of books on shelves in languages spoken within the community was experienced as increasing a sense of belonging, and worth a journey to see. The books taking up literal space is equated with a language community taking up metaphorical space in the library and city. The possibility to personally contribute stock enhanced the sense of engagement and ownership with the library. Crucially, the value of multilingual books came, at least in part, from their connection to the library itself, which means they were more likely to be read there, and left behind for others to enjoy.	Similar to stock, having events targeted at multilingual families, being part of a library's schedule of events enhanced a sense of belonging, and being able to contribute as storyteller or reader further facilitated engagement and ownership. Events aimed at multilingual communities will, in many contexts, be targeting only a fraction of the population. Combining languages to have "multilingual events" (rather than events focused on a specific language) seems to have a positive effect in encouraging language awareness and language curiosity, and facilitates a more vibrant events calendar suitable for all languages.

be theorized as two sides of the same coin – if the library can be seen as "belonging" to multilingual communities, through the dedication of physical (stock) and metaphorical (events) space, then the members of the communities, in turn, feel that they belong. This sense of belonging and ownership manifests itself in engagement and the desire to contribute – as a multilingual storyteller or reader, or through the donation of books. Importantly, this circular relationship is linked to the library itself, and does not necessarily require the removal of books from the premises – in fact, by taking books away from the library, its very purpose for multilingual communities is undermined, namely the purpose to make multilingualism visible and audible in the wider community. This notion of representation – i.e. focusing not just on what something *is* and *does*, but also what it *represents*, has occurred in prior research with multilingual communities, where it became apparent that multilingual children had much more complex associations with what they read and why they considered it important, highlighting what books represented more than the plot or genre (Little 2024). As such, the paper makes an original contribution to the field of library and information science, arguing for multilingual libraries as specific spaces where "success" needs to be viewed and assessed in new ways, as outlined here.

For librarians, their perezhivaniya shows the library as a logistical headache when it comes to making existing practices and programs fit in an environment that is new, but it also means reaching new audiences and re-defining what "successful engagement" with the library looks like for these audiences. Since notions such as a sense of ownership and belonging are typically intangible, and since the feeling of ownership and belonging is tied to the library itself (rather than the borrowing of library stock), many traditional measures of success or key performance indicators do not appear to be suitable for multilingual libraries. Instead, new success measures must be found that focus on a sense of belonging and ownership, and take into account the role of the library as both a physical and a metaphorical space (Little and Murray 2024).

At a theoretical level, utilizing perezhivanie as a multifactorial lens or prism through which to explore a single phenomenon offers alternative ways to conceptualize stakeholder research. In this study, specifically illuminating stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, difficulties and emotional attachments from a variety of angles, questioned and redefined the very notion of how "success" in the context of libraries might be interpreted. The findings from the paper point to recommendations in the field of library science – on the one hand, specifically focusing on the emerging field of multilingual libraries. In this area, understanding that traditional measurements of success simply won't "hold true" is an important step to help the development of multilingual libraries. Going further, opportunities to become directly involved – through

book donations, readers, or storytellers, enhances public attachment to the library, further a sense of ownership and belonging. As such, collaboration with cultural brokers or local community groups can be vital for providing these community groups with the public space and validation that many parents described as highly important, and the notions of belonging and ownership must be understood to be inextricably linked to the multilingual library.

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Dr Sabine Little is a Senior Lecturer in Languages Education at the University of Sheffield. Her work focuses on multilingualism as a social justice issue, highlighting identity and belonging within multilingual communities. She has consulted for the International Baccalaureate Organization and the National Literacy Trust, as well as a variety of schools and organizations. The work on the multilingual children's library received the international Brenda Eastwood Award for Diversity and Inclusion.

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